



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr TIKIRI BANDARA MADUWEGEDERA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC
OF SRI LANKA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 29 May 2008

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Vatican today and to accept the Letters of Credence whereby His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings you have extended on his behalf, and I ask you to assure His Excellency of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the entire nation. Our meeting today is a propitious occasion for me to affirm my deep respect for the people of Sri Lanka and its rich heritage, as well as my desire to strengthen further the diplomatic ties between your country and the Holy See.

Mr Ambassador, I am grateful for the appreciation you have expressed on behalf of your fellow citizens for the Catholic Church's ongoing charitable activity in your nation. In particular, you have highlighted the Church's contribution to the relief efforts after the devastating tsunami struck your nation in 2004. Such action is a concrete example of the Church's willing and prompt response to the mission she has received to serve those most in need (cf. *Lk 10:25-37*; *Deus Caritas Est*, 29). I wish to assure your Government that the Church will continue in her efforts to reach out with compassion to all, and I commend any future measures which will help guarantee that Catholic hospitals, schools and charitable agencies can continue to care for the sick, the young and the vulnerable regardless of ethnic or religious background (cf. *ibid.*, 30)

Catholics in Sri Lanka, together with other Christians, are united with many Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims in the ardent longing for lasting peace in the country and a definitive end to long-standing

grievances. Sadly, violence continues to take its toll on the populace, causing grave concern to the Holy See and the international community. Frank and sincere negotiations, regardless of the investment of time and resources they require, are the only sure means to achieving reconciliation and addressing problems that have long hindered peaceful coexistence in Sri Lanka. In particular, acts of terrorism are never justifiable and always constitute an affront to humanity (cf. *Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*, 4). Indeed, arbitrary attacks fail to give effective voice to the interests of the various groups on whose behalf they are purportedly carried out. They can regrettably provoke indiscriminate reactions that similarly place the innocent in harm's way. Such cycles of violence obfuscate the truth, perpetuate a volley of accusations and counter-accusations, and leave people disillusioned and despondent. For this reason, the struggle against terrorism must always be carried out with respect for human rights and the rule of law (cf. *Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace*, 8). I exhort all parties to spare no effort in creating a climate of trust, forgiveness and openness by listening to one another and showing reasonable respect for each other's legitimate aspirations.

Your Excellency has also drawn attention to the disturbing trend of recruiting children to engage in combat or in terrorist activities. Such practices must be condemned at the outset, for they inevitably stunt the moral development of children, leaving scars that last a lifetime (cf. *Message for the 1996 World Day of Peace*, 3) and tearing the moral fibre of society itself. Jesus admonished men and women to avoid causing scandal towards these "little ones" (cf. *Lk 17:2*), even instructing adults to imitate their virtue and purity (cf. *Mt 18:2*). I implore leaders in your country and throughout the world to remain vigilant so that no compromise will be made in this regard. Children and adolescents must receive a solid formation in moral values today which will strengthen the social fabric of your country tomorrow. Indeed, an appreciation of these values and an attitude of respect for others are just as important as any technical skills young people may acquire in view of their professional vocation.

Initiatives aimed at achieving peace need to be rooted in a proper understanding of the human person and the inviolability of his or her innate rights. As I recently remarked, the "universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights all serve as guarantees safeguarding human dignity" (*Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 18 April 2008). Your Excellency has pointed to new mechanisms which have been set in motion to monitor human rights and redress humanitarian issues in Sri Lanka. In this regard, it is encouraging to note your Government's decision to set up a special Commission of Inquiry for the purpose of investigating cases where there seems to have been a disregard for justice and human rights. It is hoped that every effort will be made to ensure that the Commission completes its work expeditiously so that the truth about all of these cases may come to light. I think in particular of Father Jimbrown and his assistant, whose whereabouts are still unknown, almost two years after their disappearance. The Government's interest in these cases reflects the responsibility of political authorities to guarantee an ordered and upright community life based on the principles of justice and directed towards the attainment of the common good (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 74).

Mr Ambassador, as you assume your new responsibilities, I offer you my good wishes for the successful fulfilment of your mission, confident that the bonds of friendship which exist between the Holy See and Sri Lanka will be further strengthened in the years to come. I assure you that the various offices and departments of the Holy See are ready to offer their resources in a spirit of collaboration. Upon Your Excellency, your family and the people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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